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28 September 1953

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Possible Topics for Discussion with Admiral [REDACTED]

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I. RELIABILITY OF INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES OF SOVIET CAPABILITIES

a. All intelligence estimates today seek to present, not the maximum, but rather the best mean of the range of possibilities. Where that range can itself be stated, this is done — notably in the JAEIC estimate of the Soviet atomic stockpile. In particular, the Edwards report adopted a reasonable medium view both of the Soviet atomic stockpile and air delivery equipment, and ~~and~~ the effectiveness of Soviet attacking strategy. The Edwards Committee, and the subsequent Bull Committee, went to great lengths to squeeze out all inflation possibilities and to follow actual US experience, with a substantial allowance for comparative Soviet inefficiencies. Thus, on the question of in-flight refueling, the Bull Committee insisted on a lengthy demonstration, from US experience, of the feasibility and simplicity of such action in the northern latitudes where the Soviets would have to perform it.

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equipment
estimates
from
estimates
what
they can
do with it*

b. In the standing estimates of Soviet capabilities, all the service O/B information is [exhaustively] sifted in the estimates process, and the final statements are appropriately qualified. Two or three years ago, these estimates may have been in large part uncritical "boiler plates"; this is emphatically not true today. Furthermore, any tendency to use a maximum figure is resisted strongly.

c. On vital elements of Soviet strength, contemporary intelligence estimates in the last five years have generally been behind, rather than ahead of, the actual facts as revealed by later intelligence. Examples are: the MIG development, the IL 28 development, the CPS-6 type radar development and the rapidity of growth in numbers of all of these. And, of course, the hydrogen bomb as the prime example.

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